December 1933

The American Federation of Labor

Whose patron saint is not Karl Marx but Benjamin Franklin, the bourgeois craftsman. A critical analysis of the nation's only important body of organized labor, and an answer to the question: will there be a labor revolution under NRA?

A. F. of L. [illegible] photographs except Portrait of Miller

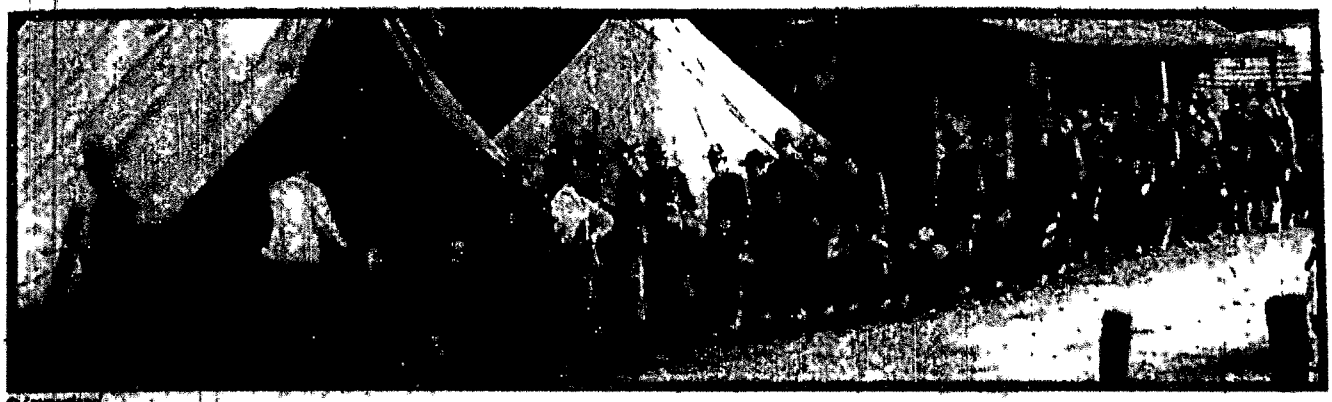
THE BIG SHOTS OF THE A. F. OF L.

. . . are earnest, conciliatory, dullish William Green (*top, right*) and the man who in 1924 made him president of the Federation, John Llewellyn Lewis (*directly above*). Lewis is the brainy and brawny president of the United Mine Workers, biggest union in the whole Federation. They were caught unawares in these poses at this fall's convention in Washington. With President Green are John P. Frey (left), once an iron molder and now the Federation's most learned scholar, and (center) James Wilson, fourth vice president and a labor adviser at last summer's London Conference. Wilson was a close friend of Gompers and many picked him as Gompers' successor. With Boss Lewis in the lower picture appears his wife, once a schoolteacher, who refined his language, got him to read Plato and Shakespeare, and made him one of the most cultivated and eloquent speakers in the ranks of labor.

THE National Recovery Act was designed to stimulate business and industry. There has been some skepticism as to its efficacy in that direction but none at all on the score of whether it has inspired American labor to a new militancy. For in NRA is a clause that ranks with that memorable sentence in the Clayton Act which thrilled every workingman in 1914: "The labor of a human being is not a commodity or article of commerce." The clause stands at the head of Section 7, Subhead (1), Subsection (a): "That employees shall have the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing." These seventeen words have opened the lid of a Pandora's box of strikes and labor unrest. Nonetheless, there are good reasons for skepticism concerning any uprising of labor in the near future. They are detailed in the following article. The argument may be reduced to its bare bones of logic thusly:

Imprimis, all U.S. labor turns for leadership today to the only body of organized labor in the country that amounts to anything: the American Federation of Labor. *But* the Federation has been suffering from pernicious anæmia, sociological myopia, and hardening of the arteries for many years, and once the effects of the NRA shot-in-the-arm have worn off, it will probably go into a decline again . . . *Because* its leaders are machine bosses who are as inept at directing a militant labor movement as they are skillful at keeping their jobs . . . *And because* its members are skilled craftsmen, "the aristocrats of labor," who trade in vested rights (in their jobs), and to whom such vested rights are as sacred as they are to the most conservative banker. They are not going to endanger these rights for the sake of any proletarian uprising of labor . . . *And so* at this fall's A. F. of L. convention they failed to take the one step that alone could revitalize the Federation: the formation of industrial unions which would include all the workers, skilled and unskilled, in each industry . . . *Which means* that the great mass of American labor, which the machine age is reducing more and more to an unskilled status, is locked outside the Federation's doors . . . *Therefore*, with the A. F. of L. laying down on the job, the revolt of labor must be led by the left-wing groups (chiefly Communist and I.W.W.) if it is to be led at all, but there is no permanency in a left-wing U.S. labor movement . . . *And it is all because* the American workman is capitalistic by nature. That is why the A. F. of L., despite its many shortcomings, is the only major labor group, and that is why there will be no uprising of workers.

UNDER NRA the Federation's membership has grown from a 1932 figure of 2,000,000 to a present figure somewhere over 4,000,000. President Green sees an ultimate membership of 6,000,000, but this depends on the outcome of the craft vs. industrial union controversy, the most vital issue now before the Federation. "Organize the unorganized in the mass-production industries," keynoted President Green just before this fall's convention. But the failure to approve industrial unions made his keynote go sour. Ever since its founding in 1886 the Federation has been organized along craft lines. All the carpenters, for example, are in one union whether they make boxes, put up suburban houses, or work in furniture factories. Their skill is what they have



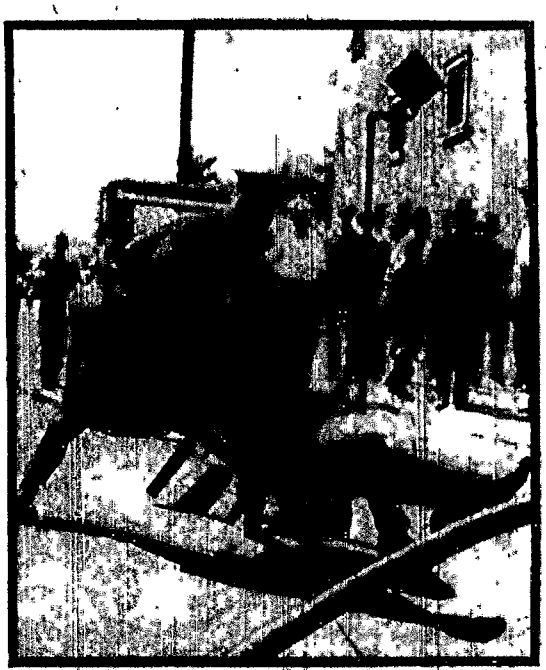
HARLAN COUNTY, KENTUCKY, MOBILIZES FOR THE LABOR WAR

When guns blazed in the Kentucky mine strike two years ago, the Governor sent in these militiamen to keep order. Before hostilities ceased, twelve miners and four deputies were killed, thirty miners and no deputies had been indicted for murder. These are the usual ratios in labor battles.

to sell and they band together to get the best price for it. But mass production has lessened the demand for skill. Most of the mass industry workers are semi-skilled or unskilled, and practically all of them feel a closer community of interest with fellow steel or automobile workers than with technically similar workers in other industries. Splitting up such workers among craft unions has been tried—notably in the great steel strike of 1919—but it is a futile intellectual exercise whose artificiality leads to endless jurisdictional bickerings among the unions. The logical solution is the industrial union, which ignores craft lines—negligible in the mass industries anyway—and embraces all the workers in one industry.

The only direction in which the Federation can grow is toward the unskilled. The nation's union membership is concentrated in such highly skilled crafts as printing, clothing manufacturing, railroading, and building trades. The great mass-production industries—steel, automobiles, rubber, and the rest—which account for the bulk of workers, are solidly open shop. And will be until the Federation sets up industrial unions. Why, then, the dogged refusal of the craft unions to hear of any such thing? Primarily because of the idea that the craft union has property rights to certain types of jobs. Industrial unions obviously would invade these rights by organizing workers who might otherwise be enrolled in the existing craft unions. They would also give the unskilled a powerful, and perhaps dominating, influence in the Federation which they would not have if they were split up among the craft unions. And so the Federation, putting its immediate selfish interests above the general welfare of the laboring class, now as always, has decided to stick to a form of unionization that was antiquated twenty years ago.

It is characteristic of the A. F. of L. that its leaders played no part in drawing up Section 7 of NRA. They were not present at the meeting in Senator Wagner's office last spring whence NRA, and Section 7 in particular, traces its history. James Warburg was there, Professor Moley was there, H. G. Moulton



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THEY TREAT 'EM ROUGH IN CALIFORNIA

NEW YORK CITY MOBILIZES FOR THE LABOR WAR

How to keep pickets from beating up scabs (strikebreakers to you) is often a major point in the employer's strategy. And so, when aggressive picketing discouraged its strikebreakers from going home to dinner, the Interborough Rapid Transit Co. turned its car barns into barracks.

of the Brookings Institution and W. Jett Lauck the economist were there, Fred I. Kent of the Bankers Trust was there, James Rand Jr. of Remington Rand was there, Dr. Meyer Jacobstein of Rochester, New York, and many another unlikely person managed to be present. But not a single labor leader was visible. "The drafting of the Recovery Act was more or less a confidential matter," explains one of its authors, "and the A.F. of L. officials at the time were not informed about it." Section 7 was drafted largely by Messrs. Lauck and Moulton. On the eve of the introduction of the bill into Congress, the Federation leaders were taken into confidence. The Federation's lobby managed to get Section 7 strengthened during its passage through Congress.

Without exaggeration, Section 7, Subsection (a) may be called the greatest concession to labor in American history. For the first time, the employer has been compelled to deal with whatever unions his employees may set up. And it was all initiated without the slightest assistance from the official leaders of the American labor movement. "They were not informed about it."

Here is matter for sorrow or for laughter depending on one's social point of view, for irony perhaps, but certainly not for surprise. Time was, the history books say, when the A. F. of L. was young and aggressive and virile, when Sam Gompers stood ready to go to jail for boycotting a stove and range manufacturer, when the famous "Dynamite Conspiracy" trial cost the government over $1,000,000 and sent thirty-two A. F. of L. officials to Leavenworth, when an A. F. of L. convention declared for the eight-hour day and laid plans for a nationwide general strike to get it. But all that was long, long ago. Today the Federation is well-intrenched and hence conservative, middle-aged and hence short as to wind and heavy as to waistline. It is having a hard enough time keeping up with the labor movement under NRA, to say nothing of leading the procession.

Whether it leads or follows, the Federation's 4,000,000 members form practically the entire body of the nation's organized labor. Now that Sidney Hillman's 120,000 Amalgamated Clothing Workers have been taken into its ranks, the only important outside unions are the Big Four railroad unions, with a membership of some 500,000. The left-wing unions exist chiefly on paper and in the imaginations of their orators. Essentially, the Federation is a loose-knit conglomeration of 108 national and "international" (including Canada) trade unions, all the way from John Lewis' huge United Mine Workers (600,000 members)* down to the International Union of Journeymen Horseshoers of the U.S. and Canada (200 members). Initiation fees range from $5 to $100, dues from fifty cents to $4 a month. These are collected by the 29,315 locals, which retain from 40 to 60 per cent and pass the rest on to the national union, which in turn pays into the Federation one cent per member per month. For the fiscal year ending August 31, 1933, the Federation collected $457,924, spent $424,256, reported a balance of $402,138 invested mostly in government and Federal Land Bank bonds.

THE Federation has a big building in Washington in Massachusetts Avenue for its headquarters. Here are the offices of William Green, the earnest, conciliatory mine worker who succeeded the late Samuel Gompers in 1924 as president; of oily, verbose Matthew Woll, third vice president (his oratory has eclipsed the first and second) and arch-conservative of the Federa-

**Union membership figures often represent ideals rather than actualities. Greatest idealists are the United Mine Workers who reported to the Federation 308,000 members in 1932 but claimed only 156,000 at their own convention that year. The latter figure is probably closer to the truth, but since the official Federation figures are used for other unions, the U.M.W. membership is obtained by adding 300,000 new recruits to its claims under NRA to 308,000 members it claimed in 1932.*

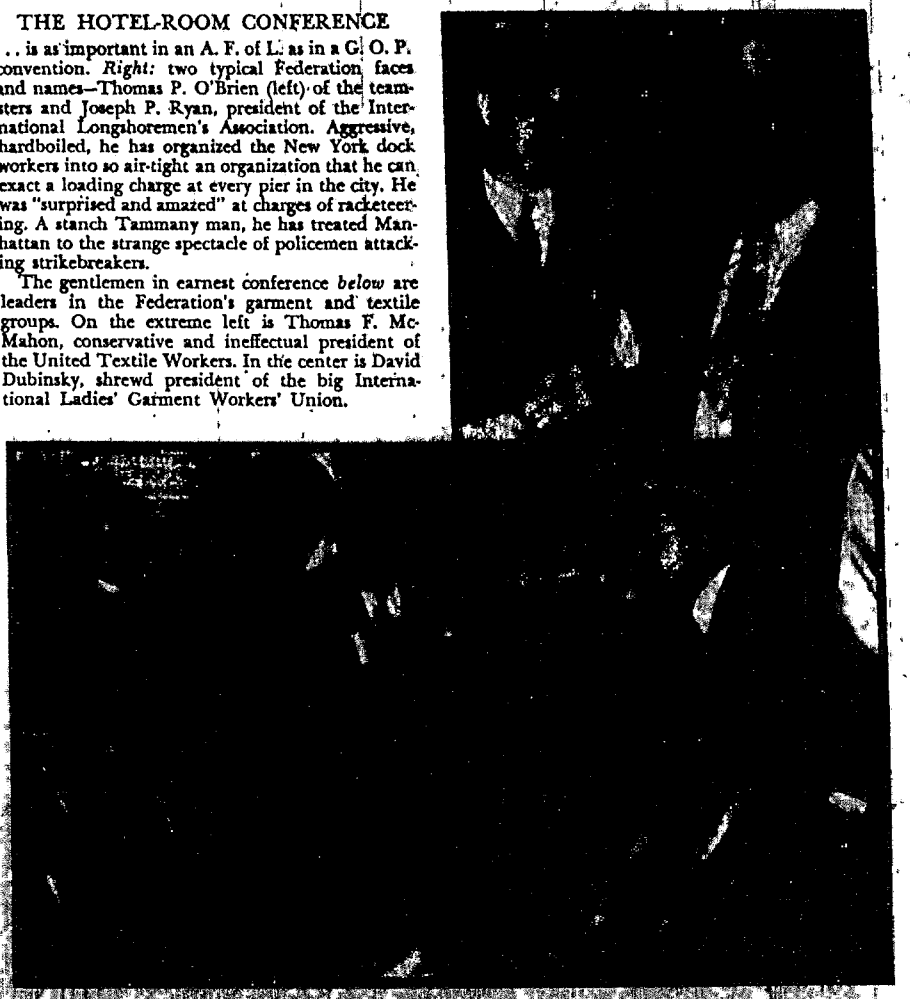
LABOR LEADERS AT PLAY

No proletarian, the A. F. of L. leader is blood brother to George Follansbee Babbitt. And so Photographer Atkins records him at this fall's convention in all his white-collar, business-suited, baldheaded, horn-rimmed, bourgeois glory. Rotary has staged many such celebrations as the stag party given by Washington's Social Oyster Club for the Federation. After drinking a proper amount of beer (*top*) the participants make dance behind Social Oyster President Clark (*left*).

The gentleman in full dress (*right*) is Edward F. McGrady, who last summer resigned as lobbyist for the Federation to become an Assistant Secretary of Labor. He is greeting a labor friend at a dinner given in his honor during the convention. Along with most A. F. of L. bigwigs, McGrady is unpopular with the militant and radical leaders of labor. They approve neither his persuading the insurgent Pennsylvania miners to return to work last summer nor his dictum this fall: "There is no necessity for strikes now."

tion; of big, handsome, gray-haired Frank Morrison, who has been secretary since 1897 and who is one of the old-line Gompers lieutenants; of scholarly John P. Frey, secretary-treasurer of the Metal Trades Department, who rose from iron molder to special lecturer at the University of Chicago; and of many another bigwig in the hierarchy of the Federation. Every fall the Federation holds a two-week convention to elect its officers (who usually hold office until removed to a higher sphere) and to decide on general policies. At such gatherings Messrs. Green, Woll, Morrison, and the rest are much in evidence as the titular leaders, but the real bosses are the heads of the powerful national unions. Lacking any real authority, the Federation must let its constituent unions do pretty much as they please. The result is that whenever an issue is to be met or a policy formulated, the Federation mounts its horse and gallops off in all directions.

The best way to get a general idea of the Federation is to examine a few of its outstanding unions. Noteworthy are: the United Mine Workers (308,000 members in 1932), of which more later; the International Association of Machinists (71,000 members in 1932), which has half its members in railroad work, very few in steel and other mass-production industries; the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners (290,000), most pugnacious about jurisdictional rights, most independent of the Federation, and most potent of all the potent building trades unions; the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers of America (139,000), which few strikebreakers dare beard, which has unionized 75 per cent of New York's electrical workers, and is



THE HOTEL-ROOM CONFERENCE

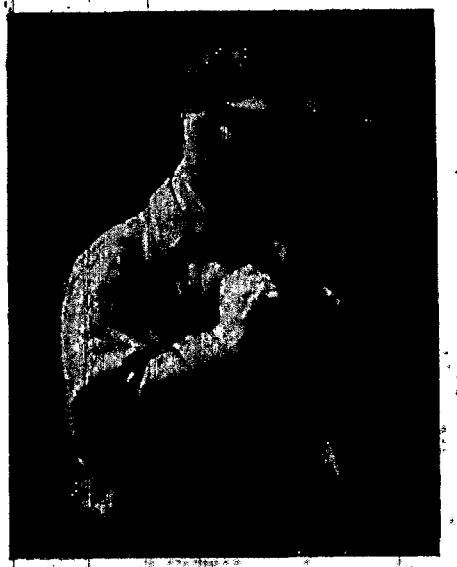
. . . is as important in an A. F. of L. as in a G. O. P. convention. *Right:* two typical Federation faces and names—Thomas P. O'Brien (left) of the teamsters and Joseph P. Ryan, president of the International Longshoremen's Association. Aggressive, hardboiled, he has organized the New York dock workers into so air-tight an organization that he can exact a loading charge at every pier in the city. He was "surprised and amazed" at charges of racketeering. A stanch Tammany man, he has treated Manhattan to the strange spectacle of policemen attacking strikebreakers.

The gentlemen in earnest conference *below* are leaders in the Federation's garment and textile groups. On the extreme left is Thomas F. McMahon, conservative and ineffectual president of the United Textile Workers. In the center is David Dubinsky, shrewd president of the big International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union.

THE COMMITTEE MEETING

In various rooms of the Willard Hotel this fall sat the various committees of the A. F. of L. deciding what should be brought to the attention of the convention and what should not. Photographer Aikins sought them out. *Above* he shows the officers of the Committee on Laws ruminating. On the left is Secretary Edward J. Volz of the photo-engravers, a devout Catholic who plays a big part in the affairs of The Church in New York City. The spacious gentleman on the right is Martin F. Ryan, chairman of the committee, boss of the railway carmen since 1909.

A corner of the important Committee on Resolutions appears to the *left*. Chairman is Matthew Woll (center), arch-conservative, red-baiter, rock-bound Republican, and chief public speaker of the Federation. With his back to the camera sits elderly George W. Perkins, of the once-mighty cigar-makers union. On the left is Victor A. Olander of the International Seamen's Union.



"TO HELL WITH THE OPERATORS!"

PANDORA'S BOX?

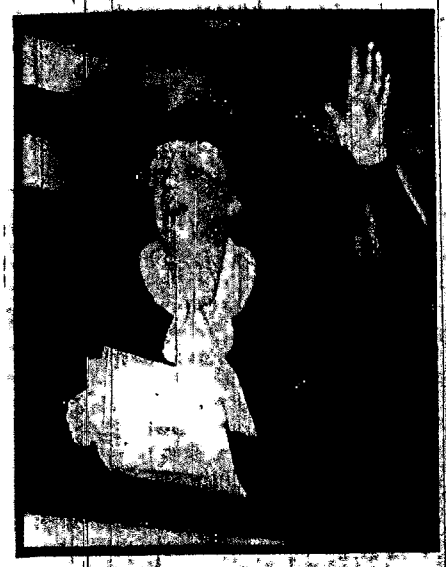
To strike or not to strike, that is the question. It is answered in the negative by the employers, by the government, and by labor's official leaders—the bosses of the A. F. of L. The emphatic gentleman on the *right* is Matthew Woll, typical of the conservative A. F. of L. chieftains who exhort restless workers to this effect: "This is no time to strike. Stick on the job and take your grievances to Uncle Sam." But the rank and file has come to believe, rightly or wrongly, that only by aggressive striking can labor enforce its rights under NRA. The defiant gentleman on the *left* is Martin Ryan. He is the leader of the insurgent Pennsylvania miners, who thundered: "To hell with the operators! We're not going back to work until they sign with the union."

Below is a map of the industrial East. Beyond the margin in New Mexico, California, Arizona, Missouri, there stand many more industrial warriors. Industrial centers like New York and Chicago are jammed, packed with pickets warring against sweatshops, unwilling employers. Traditional sore spots like Pennsylvania and Illinois are erupting with recognition strikes, jurisdictional warfare. Just how black such a map should be no man knows, nor will he know until scholars compile the records years hence. But even the meager reports of today show that NRA has restored fighting guts to labor, taken the lid off many a boiling industrial pot.

"THIS IS NO TIME TO STRIKE!"

N R A: THE STRIKE FRONT

NOTE: THIS MAP OF THE INFECTED AREA IS CUMULATIVE, INCLUDES *ALL* STRIKES SINCE NRA BEGAN



LABOR'S ABLEST CHAMPION

. . . under NRA is not plodding Bill Green, president of the A. F. of L., but brilliant Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor. A lifetime crusader against sweatshops and child labor, she has shown a vast sympathy with labor's struggle for better wages and hours under the NRA codes and considerable ability in protecting labor's rights. She here appears as she addressed the convention.

FRIEND OR ENEMY?

. . . is the question labor has been asking about General Johnson, NRA Administrator, who appears *below* with his inseparable secretary, Frances Robinson, whom every one in Washington knows as "Robbie." On the one hand he has consistently upheld the right of employees to join unions of their own choosing as stipulated in Section 7 of NRA. On the other, he denounces strikes as "economic sabotage" and prophesies "destruction" to the labor movement if they don't cease. Truth seems to be that Johnson has been interested only in getting NRA working and that he will fight either capital or labor, whichever bars his way. The A. F. of L. convention applauded when he told it there were fewer strikes in this recovery than in any other in history.

now going after the rest; the International Typographical Union (76,000), which is one of the oldest unions, which has strongly centralized control, and whose receipts for the year ended June 20, 1931, came to $2,714,000 (more than four times as much as the parent Federation took in); the American Federation of Full-Fashioned Hosiery Workers (18,000), whose Socialist officials took the revolutionary step several years ago of accepting wage cuts from union employers to help them compete with nonunion employers (see FORTUNE, January, 1932, for a full account of this union); the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (40,000), whose Jewish membership seems radical to the rest of the Federation and arch-conservative to the Communists, which has done some aggressive striking and claims to have pushed its membership to 175,000 under NRA; the Order of Railroad Telegraphers (37,000), which is one of five railroad unions with a total membership of 144,000 affiliated with the Federation, and whose Telegraphers' National Bank was reported to be in better condition than any other bank in St. Louis after last winter's bank holiday.

Few labor organizations ever had a more golden opportunity than the Federation has under NRA. It is bungling that opportunity by (1) failing to give the labor movement an aggressive, effective leadership and (2) by refusing to revise its outworn craft unionism so as to include the masses of unskilled workers. Let us inquire more specifically how it is bungling, and why.

Regardless of one's views on the right of labor to strike under the NRA, it must be admitted that the strike has been labor's most effective weapon in getting its rights under Section 7 (a). Arbitration boards are worthy institutions, but economic conflicts are ultimately decided by force—and the strike is labor's heavy artillery. Ask a Manhattan blouse cutter if sweatshop conditions could have been abolished without last summer's strike of 60,000 dress workers. Ask a Pennsylvania coal miner whether the operators would have recognized the United Mine Workers if the insurgent strikers had not stayed out of the mines for months. Ask the Paterson, New Jersey, silk dyers what chance they would have stood of forcing union recognition unless they had walked out and grimly stayed out.

The attitude of the A. F. of L. toward strikes closely parallels that of the Administration for the good reason that its officers have become government officials. They realize that strikes endanger NRA and they do their best to prevent them. No one tried more earnestly than John Lewis to get his United Mine Workers back to work. And the Federation leaders would have called the silk strike off months ago had not the rank and file, supported by the Communists, insisted on fighting through to a finish. Just as Wilson tamed organized labor during the War by putting Gompers and other Federation leaders in flatteringly high governmental posts, so Roosevelt has taken labor into camp. President Green, Berry of the printing pressmen, Hillman of the clothing workers, Frey of the metal trades, Lewis of the miners, Franklin of the boilermakers, are all on the Labor Advisory Board of NRA. Last summer Edward McGrady resigned as the Federation's lobbyist to become an Assistant Secretary of Labor. Shortly afterward, he succeeded by a liberal use of Roosevelt's magic name in getting Lewis' insurgent Pennsylvania miners to go back to work.

ALTHOUGH the Federation has shot up under NRA like a magic beanstalk, its hostility to the industrial union means that a good proportion of the new members won't stick very long. The brewery workers,

SAMUEL GOMPERS, PRESIDENT 1886-1924

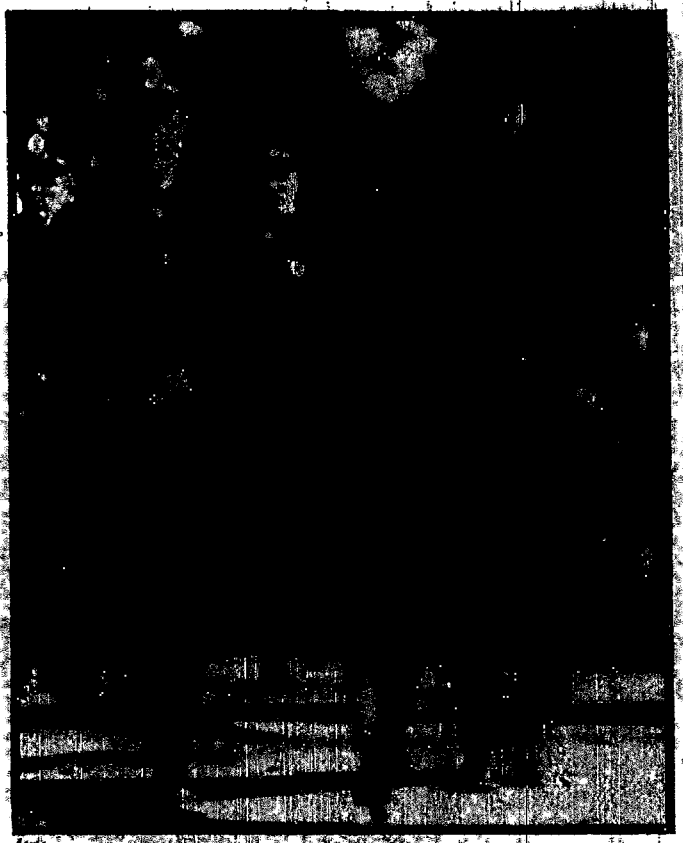
If ever a man served an institution with single-minded devotion, that man was Sam Gompers, the little Jewish cigar maker who served continuously as president of the A. F. of L. from its founding until his death four decades later. At this fall's A. F. of L. convention President Roosevelt dedicated a bronze memorial to Gompers. To get the statue delivered in time for the exercises the Federation had to call off a strike in the bronze foundry where it was being cast. The President's speech praised Gompers for his War-time coöperation with the Wilson Administration, drew an apt parallel with the present attitude of Federation leaders.

for example, are to lose their truck drivers, engineers, and firemen to craft unions in those fields. They carried the fight to the floor of the convention, where they were voted down 14,000 to 6,000 (half of the 6,000 votes coming from the semi-industrialized United Mine Workers). They threatened to withdraw from the Federation. In most cases, the craft vs. industrial issue has been successfully dodged so far by organizing mass-production workers into "federal unions," each of which is directly controlled by the Federation and includes all the workers in one plant. But the federal unions must, before long be either grouped into industrial unions or split up among the craft unions. The latter course now seems inevitable. It will destroy any possibility of the Federation's leading a mass labor movement. It will definitely limit its membership to a few million "aristocrats of labor." It will leave the majority of workers in their present unorganized state. But the craft unions will protect their property rights and their bosses will keep their jobs.

The Federation does not move with the times because it is to a great extent dominated by bosses and it is not in the interests of these bosses for it to do so. The bosses are the heads of the powerful national unions, men like Lewis of the miners, Hutcheson of the carpenters, Berry of the printing pressmen, Tobin of the teamsters, and Ryan of the longshoremen. The earnest Bill Green, the eloquent Matthew Woll, the learned John Frey, and the other heads of the national organization are mere "front men" for the union bosses. The solid foundation of the power of each boss is a political machine which is well lubricated with jobs and patronage after the best Tammany Hall tradition. They themselves get salaries of $5,000 to $20,000 a year, plus traveling expenses. Their followers get the cream of the union's jobs. Naturally the whole machine is opposed to any change in such a pleasant *status quo*. And the Federation is run by the machine.

The burly figure of John L. Lewis admirably epitomizes the A. F. of L. boss.* Mr. Lewis is president of the mighty United Mine Workers (and probably the most powerful individual in the entire Federation. He has been president since 1919 in spite of the fact that he is not popular with the miners whose dues pay his $12,000 a year salary and the rent for his suite in Washington's expensive Carlton Hotel. When he was defeated by Gompers in 1921 for the presidency of the Federation, he received only five of the eight votes cast by his own union. The rank and file shows little confidence in him. He was unable to halt the great soft-coal strike of 1919 and last summer failed miserably when, as a dutiful NRA official, he tried to call off the Pennsylvania soft-coal strike. His men repudiated his leadership and obstinately stayed out of the pits despite his appeals. In 1930 a rump U.M.W. convention, charging "election stealing, convention packing, and slugging of delegates" and pointing out that "the history of the U.M.W. under John L. Lewis has been an unbroken series of defeats," almost succeeded in getting rid of Lewis. And only last month 60,000 anthracite miners, disgusted with the lack of fight shown by the Lewis machine and insistent on striking for their rights under NRA, openly revolted and set up an independent union of their own. But in the face of repeated popular uprisings Lewis has kept himself in office. His methods are open to question on moral if not on practical grounds. Union politics, as he and his fellow bosses play them, are rough, tough, and dirty.

Lewis may or may not be a knave. He is certainly no fool. No labor leader was quicker to see the opportunity offered by Section 7 (which he helped push through Congress) or more aggressive in his exploitation of that opportunity. He plastered the mine fields with placards stating that only by joining the U.M.W. could the miner share in the benefits of NRA. He sent sound trucks with fiery speakers and free beer lumbering into the very citadels of the open shop. The results were spectacular: 150,000 new members in the first month of NRA, at least that many more since then. By the time the operators sat down with Lewis to sign a code, they found their mines had been unionized right out from under their feet. Lewis had scored the greatest triumph of his career. His machine politics may have caused the membership to dwindle in the past but his aggressive organizing under NRA has more than made up the loss.



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"THE RED FLAME" IS EXTINGUISHED

. . . during a Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile strike. She is Edith Berkman, a Communist agitator, and this is her second arrest in two days. The natural prey of policemen, left-wing labor leaders are more at home in jail than out.

PERHAPS the most objectionable feature about the rule of machine bosses is that, regardless of the ability and integrity of the individual boss, it inevitably leads to graft and racketeering. The parallel with Tammany Hall and such political groups is exact. The big bosses are rarely crude enough to go in for questionable activities themselves—though H. H. Broach, who lately resigned from the presidency of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, spent $533,000 of the union's money on legal services during four years of his malodorous reign. Generally, it is the local official who does the dirty work. Many roads to graft are open to him. He may sell out to employers. He may milk the union treasury through padded expense accounts, large fees to lawyers who rebate part back to him, and so on. He may go into business and, by threats of strike, blackmail employers into trading with his company. In order to practice such black arts, he sometimes must protect his position by calling in strong-arm men. These may take over the union themselves and turn it into a labor racket, as has happened in several instances in Chicago.

Behind the machine bosses and the corrupt business agents, explaining them and indeed making them inevitable, is that great central fact about the Federation: it is a

[*Continued on page 149*]

**Just as his remark at this fall's convention to his brother boss, Dan Tobin of the teamsters, epitomized the boss system: "The United Mine Workers are not apologizing for the provisions of their constitution to my friend, Dan Tobin, or any one else. We give him the right to interpret his own constitution in the teamsters' union and to run his organization any way he wants to run it—and we understand he runs it. Frankly and confidentially, we do the same."*

A. F. of L.

[Continued from page 86]

middle-class organization whose primary function is the protection of its members' property rights in their jobs. Businessmen who denounce it as "radical" and "bolshevistic" are simply talking nonsense. They may come into conflict with union labor, but it is the conflict of competitors for a share of profits and not the clash of opposed social philosophies. The Federation accepts capitalism just as whole-heartedly as the employers. In any division of the "haves" and the "have nots," its members would take their stand with the former. Their patron saint is not Karl Marx but rather Benjamin Franklin, the shrewd bourgeois printer who made himself rich and respected by a bourgeois society. To the war cry of Marxism: "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win," they reply quite justly that they have some very good jobs to lose as well. Once the bourgeois nature of the Federation is understood, many puzzling things—the failure to lead the mass movement of the unskilled workers under NRA, for instance—become clear. The whole A. F. of L. picture falls into perspective when it is looked at from this point of view.

CONSIDER the matter of jurisdictional disputes over which union is to get which jobs. These bitter and senseless struggles, which often result in the crowning absurdity of one union striking against another, are peculiarly American phenomena. They are little known in Europe, where trade unions identify themselves with broad class movements rather than with the immediate interests of their members. But the basic conception of American trade unionism is that jobs are property and that it is the function of the union to protect its members' jobs and, if possible, enhance their value. Thus the aim of every union is (1) to build up an air-tight monopoly of jobs and (2) to extend this over as wide a field as possible. Such unions as are lucky enough to achieve a labor monopoly abuse their power in precisely as antisocial a manner as the most soulless corporation. The Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paper Hangers of America and the Aluminum Co. of America are brothers under the skin. Every employer in highly unionized industries can tell stories of electrical workers who are fined if they hang more than twenty-five fixtures a day (forty can easily be hung), of elevator constructors who must be hired to look after elevators used to carry people while a building is under construction (his duties: ten minutes' oiling per day; his pay: $13.20 per day); of painters, who refuse to work with brushes over four and one-half inches wide. (See FORTUNE, November, 1930, for other examples.) Heavy initiation fees and stringent apprenticeship restrictions keep union membership down and union wages up in the most approved monopolistic manner.

Once a monopoly has been created the union moves on to its second great aim: to keep it intact and extend it as widely as possible. Each union has "jurisdictional rights" over certain types of jobs and jealously guards its province against trespassers. This attitude leads to the bitter and futile jurisdictional disputes that are constantly disrupting the national unions. The building trades, chiefly because they are less industrialized than most major industries and are consequently in a perpetual state of technological change, are the most bedeviled with jurisdictional strikes. A classic example was the protracted struggle between the bricklayers and the plasterers who fought over jobs so ardently that by the summer of 1925 they had succeeded in tying up $200,000,000 worth of construction. Recently the carpenters disagreed with the iron workers as to who should install the radiator covers in some new government buildings in Washington. Other workers whose payroll came to $40,000 a week had to be laid off while the disputants wrangled over who would get the $800 in wages the job was worth. One of the buildings so delayed was the new home of the Department of Labor.

The fact that the Federation, bourgeois to the core, has always been ultraconservative in its social point of view has forced it into positions which, to the layman, seem rather absurd. Whereas the Labor Party that ruled England from 1929 to 1931 grew out of the powerful British Trades Union Congress, the Federation has consistently opposed the formation of a national labor party. It is content to give its support (rarely united enough to be politically potent anyway) to whichever of the two major parties seem to offer the most. Toward the end of Gompers' rule, the Federation offered the strange spectacle of a labor organization spending thousands of dollars on propaganda *against* a movement to create a

[Continued on page 150]

What Does a Bank Statement Mean?

Copies of this booklet are available to business executives

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A. F. of L.

[Continued from page 149]

labor party. The Federation has also been unwaveringly opposed to the extension of governmental power over private business, which it brands "Socialism." It carries out this policy with a noble disregard of its own interests, spurning such "Socialistic" forms of state aid to labor as unemployment insurance. (In Europe, where the labor movement takes a more comprehensible direction, the unions are predominantly Socialistic and left wing.) And so one finds the Federation opposing the minimum wage proposal which Secretary Perkins wanted to include in the Black Bill of last spring. The Federation took the brilliant position that setting a minimum wage would be a "risky adventure" and might result in the minimum wage becoming the maximum and that therefore all friends of the working man in Congress should oppose such a brutal attack on the rights of labor. But it was NRA that finally set the dunce's cap on the hoary heads of the Federation's leaders. After a lifetime of energetic opposition to government control of industry, they have discovered that six months of it have done more for the labor movement in general and the A. F. of L. in particular than the preceding half a century of rugged individualism.

FOR years the Federation's chief spokesman was the reactionary Matthew Woll, acting president of the National Civic Federation, an employer-labor group in which the employer dominates and whose chief aim seems to be to prevent militant action among unions. He is also the president of the International Sportsmanship Brotherhood, whose other members include such eminent laboring men as Devereux Milburn and Marshall Field III. In his numberless orations Woll's favorite theme has been the menace of Communism; and the A. F. of L. has steadfastly opposed the recognition of Soviet Russia. The New Deal has bombarded the Federation's conservative position from all sides. Its suspicion of government in business has been allayed by NRA. The fall of Hoover has relegated Woll, a stanch Republican, to a back seat. Recognition of Russia seems at hand. And yet the Old Guard is still firmly in the saddle, as the conservative temper of this fall's convention demonstrated. Only a revolution, apparently, can shake the Federation loose from its simple faith in the *status quo*.

The conflict is epitomized in the fight over unemployment insurance in the 1932 convention. One might imagine that labor leaders would welcome unemployment insurance, and in Europe, where the labor movement is uncompli-

cated by a bourgeois point of view, such is the case. But in the U.S. there is the dead weight of tradition and the Jesuitical indirectness of the Federation mind to be considered. Tradition at the 1932 convention was represented by white-crested, stern-faced old Andrew Furuseth, president of the seamen's union, who earnestly declared: "I think you are making a mistake, men. I can't stop you, but the road you are traveling is the road that leads to the destruction of humanity and the destruction of the nation and of all other nations that can find no other way than to make out of a man a pleading beggar." The Jesuitical reasoning was supplied by the learned John P. Frey, intellectual dinosaur of the Federation, who weightily expounded "first principles" and by President Howard of the typographical union. Their argument was that employers, by gaining political control of state-administered unemployment funds, might be able to discriminate against organized labor. They also appealed to Gompers' principle of "voluntarism," a laissez faire doctrine which went out of fashion with rugged individualism. The convention voted them down not because it was swept by any wave of radicalism but simply because the depression had reduced the unions to such a desperate financial condition that they could no longer care for their own unemployed. The logic of events is sometimes too much even for A. F. of L. conservatives.

THE history of the Federation is a pilgrim's progress from a moderate left position to one on the extreme right. In 1886 the first convention adopted a constitution which stated that its mission was to protect the "toiling millions" in the struggle "between the oppressors and the oppressed . . . between the capitalist and the laborer." In 1933 President Green sees capital and labor as partners whose mutual interests far outnumber their conflicting interests. Between those two poles of thought is a half century of development which is summed up in Samuel Gompers, the Jewish cigar maker who made the Federation his one passion in life and who served as its president from its founding until his death in 1924. A man of great personal force, he was also a political realist and, where he thought the Federation's best interests required it, an opportunist. His migration to the right, then, may be viewed as indicative of the continuous pressure brought to bear on him from both within and without the Federation.

When Gompers and the A. F. of L. began their careers the American labor movement was more radical than it has ever been since. It was the heyday of the only organization that has ever seriously competed with the Federation: the flamboyant Knights of Labor, whose 700,000 members were drawn from workmen, farmers, shopkeepers, in fact from all classes of society. It drew the line only at lawyers, bankers, and saloonkeepers. A crusading mass organization with plenty of emotional and spiritual fervor, it looked far beyond trade unionism to Socialistic horizons. The infant Federation was comparatively right wing. It stood for a narrow craft unionism and showed little interest either in the mass of unskilled workers who dominated in the Knights or in their Socialistic doctrines. By the end of the century the Knights had blown up because their loose-knit organization was disrupted by the ever sharpening differentiation between the conservative and the radical elements in the labor movement.

THIS is no place to detail the history of the Federation under Gompers' long rule. His conservatism reached its climax in the World War, when he took his stand with the government and did his best to prevent strikes and "labor unrest." The Federation's membership swelled during the War, but the militant leadership came from outside the Federation, notably from the Communists, who succeeded the I. W. W. as the Federation's chief left-wing opponents. Even the great steel strike of 1919, officially a Federation strike, was organized and led by William Z. Foster, who forced the unwilling Gompers into the fight. Gompers' distrust of Foster's radicalism—well founded enough, considering that Foster later became the head of the Communist party in the U.S.—was one of the reasons the strike did not succeed.

When Gompers died at the age of seventy-two in 1924, he was succeeded by William Green, the candidate of John Lewis, boss of the miners. The new president's major contribution to date has been the celebrated "Green Policy." Based on the hypothesis that capital and labor are mutually interested in efficient production, the Green Policy tries to "sell" the union to the employer as a super-employment agency which will do away with all labor troubles and keep up high standards of workmanship. In 1929 Green tried to convert the southern textile mills to his policy. While his organizers talked to plant managers, he toured the South addressing Kiwanis and Rotary clubs. Sometimes they were so crude as to talk directly to the workers. The mill owners remained unconvinced, the employees remained unorganized, and the campaign was a failure. In 1927 an abortive attempt was made to sell the Green Policy to the automobile industry. Henry Ford is said to have observed, "I guess I can still run my business without the help of Bill Green."

The Green Policy is a logical and inevitable conclusion to the trend of the Federation's economic and social ideas. It has failed and they have failed because they do not recognize the basic conflict of interest between capital and labor. It is unfortunate that such a conflict exists. While it may be to the immediate interest of the individual employer to reduce wages, it is unquestionably to the long-range interest of his class to raise wages. But as industry is organized today, the capital-labor conflict is inevitable. The leaders of the Federation are wont to regard themselves as hard-headed "practical" men and their radical opponents as visionaries, but the Marxian theory of the class struggle is closer to reality than the A. F. of L. fantasy of the capitalist lion lying down with the working-class lamb.

It is true that the Federation is stupidly reactionary, run by machine bosses, lacking in courageous leadership. It is also true that it has managed to survive and even progress as no other American labor body has done. Its path is strewn with the bleached bones of long-defunct radical movements: the Knights of Labor, the Western Federation of Miners, the American Railway Union, and the rest. It has had its rivals, but they have never seriously threatened its supremacy. In the pre-War period the I. W. W. (officially "Industrial Workers of the World," vernacularly "I Won't Work" or "Wobblies"), led by fighters like Big Bill Haywood and Fearless Frankie Little, gave the labor movement a dynamic leadership it never found in the Federation. The Wobblies fought such major engagements as the McKees Rock steel strike of 1909, in which they promised (and kept their word) that for every worker killed a policeman would die, and the great Lawrence textile strike of 1912 which Haywood won with the aid of the beauteous Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. The Wob-

[Continued on page 152]

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A. F. of L.

[*Continued from page 150*]

blics were revolutionaries, fighters, but not builders. Once the strike was over, they were off to another battle, leaving the setting up of a permanent organization to be done by the A. F. of L. or not at all. The War shattered them; they were pacifists and admitted as much from the housetops. Their rôle has been played by the Communists in the post-War labor movement. Wherever there is trouble you will find Communist organizers. But the National Miners, the National Textile Workers, and the other Communist unions are mere skeleton organizations. Only in the Manhattan needle trades, traditionally radical, have the Communists established a permanent foothold.

The left-wing leaders are more articulate and more aggressive than the machine bosses who run the Federation. Yet the opposition never seems to get anywhere. Always one comes back to the primary fact about the American working man: he is not class conscious. If anything, he is inclined toward the conservative side. The democratic tradition has taught every American employee to consider himself a potential employer. Only when economic misery has rendered him ripe for rebellion does he respond to radical leadership, and as soon as his lot grows better, he becomes a conservative once more. This attitude of labor, baffling to European observers, is the result of the extremely capitalist nature of the U.S. In no other nation does the capitalist point of view so completely dominate press, politics, and even the law courts. With public opinion normally arrayed against labor, there has been tremendous pressure toward the right, a pressure the Federation has shown little inclination to resist.

The most highly industrialized nation in the world, the U.S. recently stood sixteenth on the list of unionized nations, with a smaller percentage of workers unionized than such backward countries as Estonia, Latvia, and Spain. Europe has accepted the labor union as an integral part of the economic structure. But the great corporations that run the mass industries in the U.S. are still open shop, and trade unionism is still confined to a minor part of the industrial front. The battle now being fought over Section 7 of the NRA was fought years ago in most European countries. That it was won by labor might be more of a portent if the American Federation of Labor were more of a labor organization.

The Steel Rail

[*Continued from page 47*]

on its way to become a rail.

And just there, knowledge stops. How much the given ton of rail is to be charged in metallurgical research, how much in the processes of rolling, how much to help cover depreciation on the monstrous and shadowy investment that towers above any steel mill, who can say, who will? What with all the things he makes and what with the ghoul-of-all-sizes named Depreciation, it's doubtful whether Mr. Taylor himself could tell you the truth if he saw reason to.

Very roughly, you might add $8 for further processing and $10 for depreciation and expensive idleness and taxes, but (like many a balance sheet) that would be only a game played with convenient figures. So all in all it looks as if Mr. Eastman could have had no especially good reason to believe that the price of rails should be $85 rather than $40. And it looks as though steelmen who claimed their current loss would be increased by filling the order were quite as unjustified.

Perhaps it was Mr. Eastman's conviction that no price willingly and jointly submitted would compare with the highly competitive prices granted to Detroit automobile buyers. Or perhaps Mr. Eastman was thinking of past fat profits. It must be confessed however that the new price of rails (which would be $42 a short ton) is down to a level lower than such roughly comparable prices as those posted for structural shapes ($84 a ton) and hot rolled strip ($85 a ton). At the current level of business, it's hardly likely that steel companies can make depreciation out of these competitive prices.

How much, when all's said and done, the steel companies will gain or lose at this new price is quite beyond conjecture. Just one thing is childishly certain: it'll mean money—grossly speaking, $36,375,000—in their pockets. And

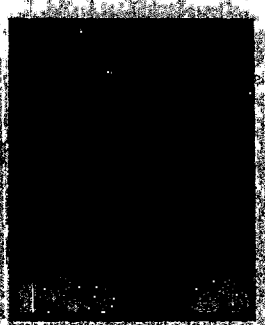
SEPT 1937

Seven Seamen

They belong to the rank and file. They want food they can eat, bunks they can sleep in, and money enough for the pleasures of the present.

IN AN attempt to catch something of the flavor of the men who do the labor of the U.S. merchant marine—a flavor that no cold facts and figures, no statistical charts or graphs or tables will yield up—FORTUNE presents the following brief sketches of seven seamen as a preface to the discussion of maritime unions on page 123. These men are not intended to be typical, for no man or series of men could typify adequately the assorted characters who man the U.S. merchant fleet. But through the recitation of their various grievances, they have given some indication of the reasons for the spectacular growth of militant unionism among seamen in the past three years. All these men are members of the rank-and-file unions, so called because their strength is derived from the common worker, rising against the entrenched power of the A. F. of L.'s International Seamen's Union, and belong either to the National Maritime Union of America or the Maritime Federation of the Pacific. Most of them have participated in the recent maritime strikes. Common to all of them is a belief that the past was hungry and horrible, that Franklin Roosevelt is the greatest President since Lincoln, that the rank-and-file unions have done a good job for the seamen, and that the owners aren't going to give them anything without battle. For the accuracy of these sketches, FORTUNE has relied on the statements of the men themselves, and with their permission has reproduced the passport photographs by which they are identified in their Seamen's Discharge books.

Shipwreck Kelly—oiler



George Patrick Kelly started to sea in 1924 as a messman on a coastwise steamer. One of a set of three pairs of twins, Kelly was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1906, the son of a civil engineer. The family migrated to Providence, Rhode Island, when he was four. Kelly got as far as the third grade, then gave up education because, he says, "I was just too god damned dumb." Kelly joined the merchant marine after seeing a navy training ship at Newport, Rhode Island. "It looked romantic like," he explains.

IN HIS fourteen years at sea Kelly has sailed as messman, ordinary seaman, A. B., boatswain, and oiler. Of medium height, he is built like an ox and has a voice like a foghorn. Between ships he has served as a bouncer and a preliminary fighter in Miami fight clubs. As bouncer Kelly was fairly successful, but as a fighter he took a lot more than he dished out, and his features are considerably battered as a consequence. Among his friends, of whom he says he has one million, he is known as "Shipwreck Kelly" or "Father Kelly." He has been arrested upwards of thirty times, usually for vagrancy, and has ridden in the boxcars of practically every railroad in the country.

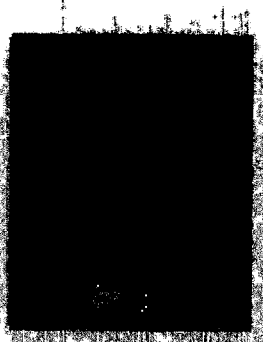
Kelly has been a union man since 1932, when he joined the International Seamen's Union of America. He went into the rank-and-file movement as soon as it started, because he regarded the I. S. U. as "very phony and very thiefy." In 1934 he was on picket duty in the West Coast strike and he also served in the tanker strike of 1935. He came east in time to participate in the spring strike of 1936, during which he and a pal named Moon Mullins acted as Joe Curran's bodyguards. In the 1936-37 strike he also worked with the contact committee, which occupied itself with "dumping scabs." Recently he helped organize the *Monarch* and *Queen* of the Furness Bermuda Line, and later was active in the Fall River Line strike. It is as a labor organizer for the National Maritime Union, rather than as a seaman, that Kelly expects to spend his time from now on.

Although Kelly disapproves of communism, he believes that Communists make good union men. Right now he says he is a member of the undercover squad in charge of liquidating I. S. U. spies and other counterunionists, who "usually wind up with their backs broke, accidental like." Kelly believes that the Roosevelt Administration and the U.S. Maritime Commission are in sympathy with the N. M. U., but he thinks that Secretary Roper is a "dirty old ——," Senator Copeland a "dirty old ——," and the New York police "a bunch of dirty bastards."

Since the rank-and-file movement got started, Kelly has noticed a gradual improvement in conditions on the average ship. Instead of unpalatable grub in small portions, the ships are turning out good fare. Bed linen gets changed more than once a month. Fo'c'sles have been made less congested, and some ships have even installed electric fans. Crews are getting bigger and the work is correspondingly lighter. And seamen no longer—or at least not so often—have to work extra hours with no overtime. When the N. M. U. has worked out its complete program, Kelly is sure that shipping labor is going to get as good a break as any labor group in the nation.

Kelly used to be a two-bottle man, but in the last year he has taken to drinking milk. He complains that milk gives him a headache, but he drinks it anyhow for the good of his stomach. On the advice of his mother, who once remarked, "Why make it miserable for two?" Kelly has never married, but being a bachelor has never troubled him. He is, he says, "known in every whorehouse in the country." His greatest ambition is to get five minutes alone with the Vice President of the I. S. U., David Grange.

Robbie Robinson—messman



Reynold Robinson shipped out for the first time while on vacation from the Brooklyn Technical High School. Robbie was born in Cuba in 1913, came to New York in 1921, when his father, a laborer in a United Fruit Co. refinery, decided that he could make more money in U.S. refineries. After graduating from Brooklyn Tech in 1929, Robbie got a job as messman on the SS. Haiti of the Ocean Dominion Line. He has been sailing as messman ever since.

IN THE opinion of Robbie Robinson the shipowners are a "lot of bullheaded bastards who don't know their —— from a hole in the ground." Robbie is tall, lean, and self-assured, with a thin mustache that barely shows up against his black skin. His principal

complaint about the owners is the fact that they're too shortsighted to give the seamen decent wages and decent conditions without a fight. "If you squawk," he says, "they say you're a god damned Communist." Robbie doesn't like Communists or communism. "I'm an American," he points out, "and I like democratic conditions. And nobody's going to talk me into a —— soviet." As messman Robbie has sailed on ships where the fo'c'sle for the messboys was the size of a linen closet, with only one light, so that if one man wanted to cork off the others had to sleep too or else sit in the dark. Ships where the grub served up to the crew was stuff that the sea gulls wouldn't eat, where there were washrooms without any running water and the bathtub was a bucket. Ships where he not only had to serve three meals a day and make up five or six rooms but also was rousted out in the afternoon to chip and paint the toilets. Ships where the bedbugs were so big "they could toss you out of your bunk," where even the messman couldn't get clean linen. Currently Robbie thinks conditions are fairly good as far as pay and food go. The biggest beef the seamen have now, Robbie feels, is the condition of the fo'c'sles, and with the N. M. U. in action he figures that they'll be improved.

Robbie joined the I. S. U. in 1932, went out on strike with the rank and file in the fall of 1936. The I. S. U. never did a thing for the seaman, he says, and if you didn't slip the delegates a little cush, you never got off the beach. Another objection Robbie had to the I. S. U. was the fact that it ran two union halls—one for the whites and one for the blacks. In the N. M. U., he says, there are no Jim Crow laws and the Negro has just as much chance as the white man to ship out. There isn't any David Grange in the N. M. U., either, and that, Robbie thinks, is a big recommendation.

Dick Flint—A. B.

Richard Flint got his first job in the merchant marine as an A. B. on the SS. Limon *of the United Fruit Line. Trained on a state school ship—which in the opinion of seamen like Shipwreck Kelly has never turned out a sailor worthy of being "a pimple on a deck boy's behind"—Flint has held a third mate's license since 1935. The son of a stove salesman, Flint was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1916, joined the school ship in 1933 after graduating from high school. He has held four jobs at sea. Besides the* Limon, *Flint has sailed as a cadet on the* Scanpenn *of the American Scantic Line and on the* Santa Rita *of the Grace Line. Currently he is sailing A.B. on American Scantic's* Scanyork.

IN THE opinion of most seamen, schoolship graduates as a rule are potential company men and are strictly anti-union. Flint became an exception to that rule last winter when he walked off the *Santa Rita* and went on strike. As cadet on the *Santa Rita*, Flint had been entitled to a room amidships and a place in the officers' messroom, and he was well satisfied. But he went on strike anyhow because he "thought the men were right" and also because he felt that if he didn't go on strike he would "get a bad name" with the rank and file.

Flint has been a member of the National Maritime Union for the past three months. He joined at the end of his second trip as A. B. on the *Scanyork*. Without organization, he says, there is no way to improve conditions on board ship, and the conditions he has seen since he began sailing in the fo'c'sle have been consistently bad. On the *Scanyork*, for instance, the sailors' fo'c'sle can legally accommodate ten men. However, law or no law, Flint thinks the fo'c'sle is too small. With six bunks double-tiered on the outboard side and four bunks double-tiered inboard, there isn't room to turn around. Besides that the fo'c'sle is dim and close, and the lockers for the seamen's gear aren't big enough. Flint thinks that a regulation ought to be passed calling for two-man fo'c'sles. But even without such regulation, he believes that the company ought to fix the fo'c'sle so there would be enough light and air. Having the combination washroom and toilet just forward of the fo'c'sle is another thing Flint objects to, since any kind of breeze "smells up the quarters." There's no kick about the food on the *Scanyork* now, but when Flint first signed on her she was "pretty hungry." Flint is satisfied with the $72.50 a month and seventy cents an hour overtime he earns as A. B. But the companies, he says, still try to get around paying the overtime whenever they can. They are permitted, he points out, to demand one hour in twenty-four from all hands to tie up or let go without paying overtime. But frequently they ask the men to do work that has nothing to do with tying up or letting go during the free hour. Another thing about the *Scanyork* that Flint doesn't like is the fact that Charlie Jacobsen, the bos'n, is signed on as A. B. No. 1 and has to stand the eight to twelve watch and supervise work on the other watches as well. Legally the company isn't required to carry a bos'n, Flint points out, and although Charlie is paid a bos'n's wage, he has to do two men's work to earn it.

As a member of the N. M. U., Flint hates the International Seamen's Union. The officials of the I. S. U., he says, never paid any attention to the rank and file and there were never any improvements made when the I. S. U. was the dominant union in the merchant marine. Flint knows nothing about the dispute between the C. I. O. and the A. F. of L. and doesn't care whether the N. M. U. joins the C. I. O. or not. He thinks that his union's policies are up to the union officials.

Flint feels that the common opinion about sailors is all wrong. For one thing they are not, he says, so addicted to wenching and bibbing as is commonly held, and they're generally pretty careful about avoiding venereal diseases. Personally he doesn't favor the idea of "commercialized love." Flint would like to quit the sea. He is anxious to get a job ashore—something like a telephone lineman—and settle down. But since jobs ashore are scarce, Flint intends, as soon as he can get enough money together, to invest in a schooner and go down to the West Indies. There is, he thinks, a lot of money to be made with a schooner, shuttling cargo around the islands. But it will take quite a while to save enough money to buy the schooner, and Flint is aiming to get a berth as third mate as soon as he can.

Ed Darling—freezer

Edward Darling has been going to sea for the past twenty-six years. Since 1928 he has held a first assistant engineer's license, but he has never attempted to sail on it, because, as he explains it, he doesn't want to become a company man. The son of a retired army officer, Darling was born in Portland, Oregon, in 1896. He joined the U.S. Navy as an apprentice in 1911, after being expelled from high school during his first term. Nine years later he was discharged from the navy as engineman, first class, and shortly afterward passed an examination for second assistant's license in the U.S. merchant marine. Since then he has sailed as wiper, fireman, water-tender, oiler, deck engineer, and freezer (which is the seagoing term for refrigerating engineer) on both coasts.

WHEN the 1934 strike broke out on the West Coast, Ed Darling was oiling on the SS. *Washington* of the States Steamship Co., which was running coastwise from San Pedro to Seattle. As oiler, he was making $45 a month, getting no time off, and being paid no overtime. He thought that the food was so fierce that he preferred to subsist on peanut butter that he'd brought aboard

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